

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

- Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Colin Perry at Albion Park, in fact Wollongong Airport on Thursday, the 22nd of July, 1999. Also present seated directly opposite me is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police. The time on my watch now is 5 minutes past 12.00. For the purpose of the record, Colin, would you please state your full name?
- A My full name is Samuel Colin Perry.
- Q2 Your date of birth?
- A 20th of the 12th, '57.
- Q3 And your address?
- A 105 Hillview Circuit, Kiama.
- Q4 And your occupation?
- A Pilot.
- Q5 O.K. As I have already explained to you, Senior Constable Upston and I are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Part of our charter is to seek information from various units used during the Hobart race in search and rescue capabilities and in a particular incident which occurred with your aircraft that you were flying in, a Air Force P3 Orion. Did you understand that?
- A Yes.
- Q6 O.K. Who are you currently employed by?

A I work part time with the City of Wollongong Aero Patrol and my main employer is BHP where I do aerial photography and mapping.

Q7 O.K. And how much flying experience do you have?

A Approximately 2,100 hours and I started flying round about 1976 I think it was.

Q8 O.K. Now if I could take you to the Sydney to Hobart last year, could you give me the type of aircraft that you were flying?

A Cessna 402.

Q9 O.K. Is that a twin engine aircraft?

A Twin engine aircraft, yes.

Q10 O.K. In fact is that the aircraft we saw - - -

A That's correct.

Q10 - - - in the hangar?

A Yes.

Q11 And what was the call sign of that aircraft?

A Papa-Echo-Hotel.

Q12 O.K. Now if I could take you to the actual, your involvement in the race so far as search and rescue, you could perhaps tell us what your role was and what you did?

A We were tasked by AussAR. Well, I can't remember the exact time we took the call but we took off out of here roughly at first light, I tracked directly from here to my designated area which I believe the first one was Oscar 1. We commenced to search there, we tracked out initially at about 3,000 feet and then descended to our

search height. With weather conditions out there the cloud was roughly at our search altitude and we were just under the cloud. It was very windy and a fairly big sea.

Q13 O.K.

A Once completing that area we returned to Merimbula to refuel and await further instructions which was to actually go back and search the same area again.

Q14 Mmm.

A And that concluded the first day searching.

Q15 What day would that be, would that be the 27th?

A I can go and check on my log book if you want, I can't remember the exact date.

Q16 O.K. Well, just offhand do you think it was the day after the race started?

A It was the day after the race started. On the start of the race day I was actually flying another aircraft doing photography for the Illawarra Mercury, which is the local newspaper around here.

Q17 Yeah.

A And we virtually followed the fleet from just off Stanwell Park I'd say virtually down to, almost to be in Ulladulla.

Q18 Right.

A At that stage you could see the, the nastiness approaching and we were getting reports, ..... reports off the aviation side of severe thunder storms rolling

in and strong winds, and then we decided just to, to go home.

Q19 O.K. Whereabouts did that weather, does that weather reporting come from?

A It was broadcast on the aviation frequency, it is a requirement that if any significant weather is going to affect aircraft that they actually broadcast it.

Q20 All right. And where does that come from?

A That came from the Air Services.

Q21 In Melbourne or Sydney?

A It would have been, we would have been on, I think that was a Melbourne frequency, 1246.

Q22 Yeah.

A ..... frequency.

Q23 And as a result of that you turned back, is that right?

A Oh, we didn't have to.

Q24 Yeah.

A But we'd had enough photography and it was getting quite dark with the cloud and things like that and it was no good for the photography anyway, so we just returned home.

Q25 O.K. And what happened the next day?

A The next day we were tasked to go down and search.

Q26 O.K. And you just told us about how you did your first day's search, searching, is that right?

A Yes.

Q27 And then you refuelled at Merimbula?

A Yes.

Q28 That was the end of the first day?

A That was the end of the, yeah, we actually did that, two searches in the one day.

Q29 Right.

A Oscar 1, and refuelling - - -

Q30 Right.

A - - - in between we had a night at Merimbula.

Q31 O.K. Now what can you tell us about an incident involving a P3 Air Force Orion?

A We were doing a westbound run, I think it was, and the weather conditions were, were fairly good where we were and you could see a fair way and I could see this Orion coming slightly across our track. I tried to call him on the current search frequency of 1231 and also the area frequency and there was no response. Then I just saw him turn off, we weren't in any real conflict of a collision otherwise I would have taken evasive action myself and a bit later on, I think, probably 5 or 10 minutes, the Orion contacted us, asking what we were doing, who tasked us - - -

Q32 Mmm.

A - - - etc, etc, to which we replied and that was the lead up to the report that went to BASI. There was also, our other aircraft also saw the Orion.

Q33 Yeah.

A It crossed their area and their area was immediately to the north of ours.

Q34 Right.

A They were operating at 500 feet and I think our search height was 1,000.

Q35 Right. And what was the distance between the two of you at that point?

A What, the Orion and ourselves?

Q36 Yeah.

A Oh, probably a mile, something like that.

Q37 Righteo.

A Maybe a little less.

Q38 Now in aviation is that considered to be close or - - -

A No, it's, yeah, fairly close, I have seen other close encounters - - -

Q39 Right.

A - - - that were closer.

Q40 And did you consider it a potentially dangerous situation or - - -

A No. As I said before, like, if I thought it was going to be dangerous I would have just broken off - - -

Q41 Mmm.

A - - - my search line which I was still on - - -

Q42 Mmm.

A - - - and got out of the way. But there was no real conflict in my mind, that's why initially I didn't even bother putting a report in about it.

Q43 Mmm. So why was the report commenced?

A The report was commenced, I had, actually Harry, who's the GM of the Aero Patrol here, received a call from

BASI, I can't recall the gentleman's name asking why we hadn't put a report in and then I submitted a report which I can give you a copy of later.

Q44        Yeah.

A            And that got faxed off to, to BASI.

Q45        Yeah.

A            And then that was my side of the story, then the rescue 251 Orion put their side in and then it went to BASE and the Defence Department and it's still ongoing as we speak.

Q46        Right.    I mean was it a situation where it was a reportable, I mean did it have to be reportable as far as you were concerned?

A            I didn't think so, I didn't think it was that close to be reportable.

Q47        What, well, what's the criteria for reporting such an incident, do you know?

A            Oh, yeah, if there's, if you consider the aircraft is going to be in danger of a collision or something like that.

Q48        Right.

A            I can't recall there's ever been ..... written down.

Q49        Yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

A            Do you want me to get that .....

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q50        Now what was the visibility like between yourself and the Orion?

A Good, at that stage it was just fine. No, at that stage it was fine, it was visual and there was no real problem at all. That's why I said I saw him coming for miles and miles.

Q51 Yeah. Yeah. Did you question him about his search pattern or his search area?

A No, I didn't.

Q52 Right.

A I actually thought he was en route to another area.

Q53 Right.

A Because he wasn't paralleling our tracks, he was cutting across slightly.

Q54 Yeah.

A And it's quite common, I used to do a lot of work out at sea with the Navy doing photography and you'd see an Orion say coming from Nowra going out to one of their restricted areas miles out to sea, he'd just lumber across.

Q55 Yeah. Now how many crew did you have on board at the time?

A I think it was four including myself at the time.

Q56 Right. So who submitted a report, yourself and the co-pilot or just yourself?

A I was the only pilot on board at the time.

Q57 O.K. O.K. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

No questions.



DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q58 Now so far as your role last year in search and rescue, do you have any, any views or suggestions for future type operations, anything that - - -

A For the future?

Q58 - - - a lesson was learned?

A By AusSAR?

Q59 Mmm.

A Well, one good one was I found out all the aircraft should be equipped with similar equipment as far as G.P.S. and things like that.

Q60 All right.

A So there's no real problem, everyone should know where they are. We had search areas that were, I think they were about 4 or 5 miles across, just blocks, and each aircraft had those, so it was fairly tight spacing but there was a 500 foot separation which was fine.

Q61 All right.

A So long as everyone is using the same gear.

Q62 Oh, O.K. So the difficulties encountered so far as altitude's concerned?

A Altitude's fine, but I believe the problem occurred with the Orion not having similar equipment to the, the civil aircraft.

Q63 Yeah. What are your views in relation to the Orion being used in that sort of manner for searching or as opposed to a communications platform or a control platform of some description?

A An Orion is a very good aircraft, it has long legs which enables it to carry out very wide searches, as you saw down in the southern oceans.

Q64 Yeah.

A As far as something in close to shore it could be better off left to the civil aircraft, the twin engine civil aircraft.

Q65 Yeah.

A Because the legs aren't extraordinarily long.

Q66 Yeah.

A And we were always fairly close to land. If you've got to go a long way out at sea - - -

Q67 Yeah.

A - - - it could be better off left to the military.

Q68 Right. Did you at any stage during your operation last year hear any Mayday calls on your radios?

A No Maydays as such, we picked up a lot of beacons.

Q69 Right.

A Honed in on some beacons.

Q70 O.K. And did you hone in on any particular yachts or - - -

A We did find one that was outside the search area that we were given, actually two aircraft, myself and another one, got there at the same time. I cannot remember the name of that, the .....

Q71 And did you see any life rafts at all at the scene?

A No life rafts as such, we found a lot of other yachts that had been dismantled and things like that, but we didn't actually find any life rafts as such.

Q72 Now at any given time during that, those searches last year, what would be the number of aircraft that would be in the air at the same time, offhand if you can .....

A I'd only be guessing.

Q73 Yeah.

A But I'd say there could be half a dozen helicopters and maybe 20 fixed wing.

Q74 Right. O.K. So have you got any suggestions which you'd like, you know, to give to us that we can provide to the Coroner in relation to future rescues or searches?

A I think the search was, was fairly well handled.

Q75 Right.

A There's nothing really I can comment on there, that, everything that was required to be done by the different air crews was done.

Q76 Mmm.

A It's really up to AusSAR or whoever's running the search to say, Well, you've got to go search this area at that particular height based on your latest intelligence.

Q77 Mmm.

A We just go and do the job.

Q78 So far as searching did you have difficulty getting information so far as what you were looking for?

A Oh, well, initially we were supposed to be looking for a yacht called the Winston Churchill I think it was.

Q79 Yeah.

A And we had a description of what that looked like and that's about all we had.

Q80 Were you told it was a wooden boat, do you recall?

A Oh, I can't remember offhand, they actually sent out a sheet - - -

Q81 Yeah.

A - - - with, there may be a copy still here.

Q82 Right.

A I can have a look for that later, but it gives what you're looking for - - -

Q83 Yeah.

A - - - where it's believed that it could be based on the intelligence, how many crew are on board, possibly what they're wearing, any significant markings on the side of the vessel, whatever.

Q84 Mmm.

A So I'll have to, I could probably try and have a find of that later for you if you like.

Q85 Yeah. O.K. Did you at any time have radio communication with the Sword of Orion on VHF marine frequency?

A No.

Q86 Did you have any communication at all with any, with any vessels on marine VHF?

A That aircraft hasn't got marine VHF, the ..... , the other aircraft we have, has. I can't comment on that one.

Q87 Was that aircraft being used at the time was it?

A It was the aircraft immediately to our north on our first day in the morning, I can't remember where it went in the afternoon.

Q88 Right. O.K. The time by my watch is now 12.18pm. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED